

# How to Write an Effective Research Question

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Some text from: Solomon, A., Wilson, G., & Taylor, T. (2012). *100% information literacy success* (2nd ed.).

Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

- 1 What's Your Lens on the Topic?** The research question (or RQ) should include **key terms** and **themes** that are most relevant to how **you** want to explore the topic.
- 2 What Terms Does the Research Use?** If you are struggling, try searching for articles with your main keywords above. **What research has been done already?** As you read the points below, see if research exists on how you want to view the topic, or if you will be **connecting the existing research to your new lens**.
- 3 Who Does Your RQ Affect?** Part of your RQ should include a focus on a certain **population**. This can be an age group, ethnic group, economic group, or another **demographic**. RQs can also look at **geographic** regions like cities, rural areas, or countries. What population do you want to examine?
- 4 Does Your RQ Invite Discussion?** When you read your RQ to yourself, you **shouldn't be able to answer it with yes or no**. Nor should the answer simply be a list of conditions or facts. An effective RQ invites **exploration and discussion**.
- 5 How Does Your RQ Measure Change?** Deciding on what to measure or what data to focus on in your research can be challenging. **How did the articles you found measure their outcomes? What data would help you answer your RQ?**

## Examples of *Ineffective and Effective* Research Questions:

### 1) *Who was Benjamin Franklin?*

This question doesn't invite an investigation, but a list (4). There's no lens, or objective to measurable (5).

**Effective RQ:** *How did Benjamin Franklin's opinion of France affect foreign policy in the colonial United States?*

### 2) *Should older people be allowed to drive?*

This is a yes/no question (4), and the word "should" invites an answer based on opinion rather than fact. Also, we aren't sure who the author means exactly by "older people," or even where these people live (3).

**Effective RQ:** *How do mandatory driving tests in the United States affect occurrences of automobile accidents?*

### 3) *Why isn't the drinking age 18?*

Try rewriting this ineffective RQ as an effective RQ below.

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# UNEARTHING YOUR TOPIC...

## Things to Consider When Thinking about Your Research Topic

### Themes, Keywords & Synonyms

Try explaining to a partner what you want to write about. As you do that, write down here all the **nouns** and **keywords** you use to describe it.

Basically, if the word helps you make your topic easier to explain, write it here.

**1 The Core of your topic...**  
What is your topic idea? What about it interests you?

**2 Who does this affect? Where are they?**  
What age groups or populations are affected? What professions? On what parts of the world do you want to focus?

**3 The Background...**  
What knowledge would a person new to your topic need to know? What have other people discovered about this issue?

**4 The Evidence**  
Where can you look for info? What fields of study do research on your topic? What government agencies or organizations?

**5 Case studies and Current Events**  
What is a story from current events that exemplifies this topic?

USE THESE NOTES TO GUIDE YOUR SEARCHES AND TO HELP WRITE YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION.